

# TURNING AI INTO A LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADVANTAGE

Local government continues to manage rising demand, financial constraints and ongoing reorganisations, while still being expected to deliver responsive, high-quality services.

It's therefore no surprise that council workforces are under pressure. As the [Local Government Association's 2024 Workforce Survey](#) highlighted, recruiting and retaining talent is increasingly difficult, with four out of five (80%) local authorities struggling to recruit and retain children's social workers. The same percentage are experiencing identical pressures in planning departments.

To paint the stark reality in numbers, since 2012 the local government workforce has declined by over half a million. That's a reduction of over 30%, so it's hardly surprising that many employees are feeling the strain of "doing more with less" across already stretched services.

## IS AI THE ANSWER?

Our latest report, [The Grey Zone: The Untapped Advantage of AI Alignment](#), surveyed leaders and employees across multiple sectors, including local and regional government, to explore how AI is reshaping the relationship between organisations, their people and the work they do. The research shines a light on the gap between AI adoption and genuine alignment – the Grey Zone where technology exists but doesn't yet deliver its full potential value.

For Zellis, and our customers, AI alignment means ensuring that AI tools are built around the way people actually work – the tasks, schedules and priorities they face day-to-day. AI tools should support sound judgement, rather than becoming just another unused system.

Building on the main research findings, this deep dive highlights the data most relevant to the local government sector in the UK and focuses on how the alignment between leadership intent and frontline experience will determine whether AI becomes a true advantage or another layer of complexity.

## THE AI REALITY: DOING MORE WITH LESS

Local authorities must co-ordinate thousands of employees across departments, locations and working patterns. HR and payroll teams manage social workers' caseload-linked hours, contact centre staffing, environmental services rotas and corporate functions, all under scrutiny from elected members and regulators.

Frontline staff often rely on multiple systems to complete basic tasks – recording case notes, logging visits, updating records, completing risk assessments and accessing policy information. For example, regulatory compliance adds further complexity, with CQC inspections now assessing whether local authorities have effective data sharing between health and social care systems. For many, the volume of digital and paper admin can feel at odds with their core motivation: helping residents and communities.

**When organisations are clear that AI is there to inform judgement rather than replace it, confidence grows, capability follows and value is unlocked. Alignment turns AI from a source of uncertainty into a catalyst for better decisions, better work and more resilient workplace cultures.**



**STEVE ELCOCK**,  
Director of Product — AI  
Zellis

## THE ALIGNMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR COUNCILS

Across the public sector, 94% of leaders say their organisation currently uses or interacts with AI tools as part of its operations, yet only 58% of employees say they use AI regularly or occasionally in their role. This shows AI is already embedded at organisational level, but employee level adoption still has room to grow.

When AI is in place, 52% of employees say it improves their productivity, and 61% say it gives them time back for more meaningful or strategic work, and over a quarter (31%) say it increases their job satisfaction. Leaders echo this, with 59% agreeing that AI improves the quality of outputs and almost half (44%) saying it increases productivity.

**For local government, the key alignment opportunities include:**

- AI-assisted scheduling and workload balancing for social care, contact centres and environmental services, helping to optimise the deployment of permanent staff and identify persistent gaps that require targeted recruitment.
- Intelligent document processing for forms, case files and compliance reports, reducing manual re-keying and supporting the evidence collection and data sharing requirement now assessed by CQC and Ofsted inspectors.
- AI-enabled triage of citizen enquiries, routing queries to the right teams while preserving human judgement for complex cases.
- HR and pay support that simplifies complex allowances, overtime and premium payments, minimising errors and queries.

## CONFIDENCE AND CULTURE

Local government employees show strong appetite for learning, with 67% saying that AI provides opportunities to learn new skills, and almost half (49%) agree that AI encourages self-directed learning and development. Furthermore, over half of leaders (57%) believe that AI increases job satisfaction.

However, there are clear differences in how responsible use and involvement are perceived. 62% of leaders feel confident their organisation uses AI responsibly and ethically, 61% believe that employees are involved in decisions about how AI is used, yet only 22% of employees feel involved in those decisions.

**Councils can close this gap by:**

- Involving frontline staff in designing, piloting and evaluating AI tools
- Communicating clearly about how AI supports, rather than replaces, professional judgement
- Building transparent governance around data use, fairness and accountability

The findings highlight that when AI is aligned with everyday work, 59% of employees say it reduces work-related stress, and 71% say it improves productivity. Leaders agree, with 62% saying AI gives their people time back for more meaningful or strategic work.



**Zellis helps councils to:**

- Connect leadership ambitions for digital transformation with day-to-day workforce realities.
- Reduce manual workload in HR, workforce management and pay, freeing capacity for strategic work.
- Provide employees with clear, reliable information about their hours, pay and leave – a foundation for trust during change.

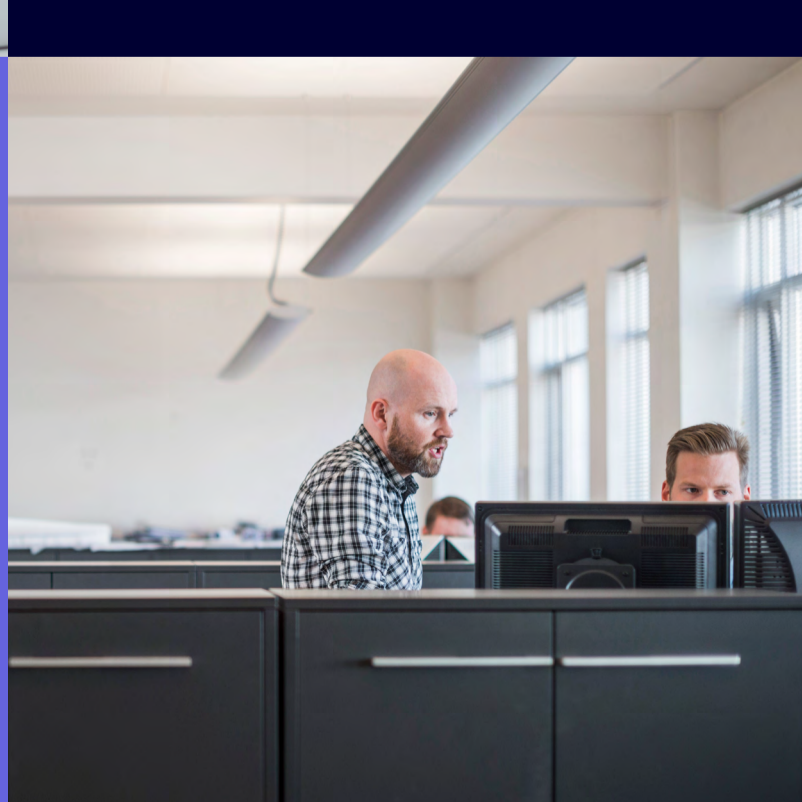
By focusing on AI alignment rather than AI for its own sake, local authorities can protect service quality, support their people and build workplace cultures that attract and retain the talent they depend on.



## CLOSING THE AI ALIGNMENT GAP

Organisations that align leadership ambition with frontline expectations and AI-enabled technology will be best placed to sustain services, retain talent and protect outcomes for citizens in an increasingly constrained public sector environment. As public bodies navigate tight budgets, evolving regulation and persistent workforce pressures, the ability to do more with existing resources has become a necessity rather than a choice.

Zellis invites leaders from local government to explore how AI-enabled HR, workforce management and pay can help close the alignment gap and realise the full value of AI across their organisations – turning grey into great.



## TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Learn more about the ways AI can unlimit what's next for your people and performance.

[Download the full report](#)

Our AI-enabled HR, Workforce Management and Pay platform is reshaping workplaces and our solutions pay one in seven people working in the UK and Ireland.

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